

Standish, Myles

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MYLES STANDISH

"The Captain of Plymouth."

By

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(Formerly of the Wigan and Carlisle
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Standish

MYLES STANDISH,

"The Captain of Plymouth."

"He was a gentleman born; could trace his pedigree plainly
Back to Hugh Standish, of Duxbury Hall, in Lancashire,
England.

Who was the son of Ralph and the grandson of Thurstan de
Standish,

Heir unto vast estates, of which he was basely defrauded,
Still bore the family arms, and had for his crest a cock-argent,
Combed and wattled gules, and all the rest of the blazon."

The Courtship of Myles Standish.—LONGFELLOW.

The romantic story of the life of Myles Standish should be particularly interesting to the people of Duxbury, Standish, Chorley and Wigan. His connection with the districts named is very vague and doubtful, as is most of our knowledge of Standish, but the chief interest lies in the supposition that he was a member of the Standish family, the Standishes having been connected with the above districts for hundreds of years, during which they have taken part in many important events. The Standishes of Duxbury have been connected with our own (Chorley) district since

the thirteenth century.* One of the members of the family, Sir Rowland Standish, served in the wars in France, and, in the fifteenth century, brought over from Normandy the (reputed) bones† of St. Laurence, which are still preserved within a niche in the chancel of the Chorley Parish Church. Ralph Standish‡ was the first to strike Wat Tyler after the latter had been knocked down by the Lord Mayor of London, and for this he was knighted by King Richard. Thomas Standish, a Royalist Captain, was slain by the Parliamentarians in Manchester, in 1642.

*It was not, however, until the year 1524, that they were in possession of Duxbury Hall.

†The following certificate of the Vicar of Croston [until 1793 Chorley was attached to the parish of Croston] is still preserved in the Harleian Manuscripts:—

"Be it knowne to all men, that I Tho. Tajlton vickar of Croston berith witnesse & certyfie that Mr. James Standish of Duxbury hath deliuered a relique of St. Laurence head into the Church of Chorley the which Sir Rowland of Standish Kt. brother of the sayd James and Dame Jane his wife brought out of Normandy to the worship of God and St. Laurence for the pfitte and auaille of the sayd church to the intent that the forsayd Sir Row Standish Kt. & Dame Jane his wife the sayd James and his wife with their pdecessors and successors may be the the sayd church ppetually prayed for & in witnesse of the which to this my psent writting I have sett my Seale. Written at Croston afforsayd the 2 day of March in ye yeare of our lord God 1442.—Harleian Manuscripts, cod. 2040, fo. 239.

‡ Said also to have been a John Standish.

Henry Standish, a Franciscan friar, became Bishop of St. Asaph in the early part of the sixteenth century. He took an important part in the proceedings for Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine, and was one of the Queen's counsellors. He went on his knees to the King and endeavoured to turn him from his purpose. Ralph Standish, who married Lady Phillipa Howard, daughter of Henry, Duke of Norfolk, took part in the rebellion of 1715, and was taken prisoner at Preston Fight. He was convicted of treason and his estates were forfeited, but afterwards restored to him.

Myles Standish was born, it is supposed, in 1584. Who his father was we do not know. Where he was born, educated, and spent his youthful days, will, we fear, remain a mystery. Before 1603 he had obtained a commission in Elizabeth's army, and he fought (in the Netherlands) under the Veres in the war against the Spaniards. When the twelve years truce was agreed to, Standish stayed at Leyden, and at that place became acquainted with the Puritans* who had fled there in order to escape the cruel persecutions to which they had been subjected in England.

Standish seems to have become very friendly with several of the Puritan leaders, and it was probably his friendship, together with his love for adventure, that

* Or Separatists.

induced him to join them in their emigration to the New World. Hence we find that when the "Mayflower" sailed from Plymouth, on 6th September, 1620, he was one of the passengers. His nature was in so many respects dissimilar to that of the Pilgrims that it is very strange how he—the rough soldier—came to join those humble men and share in their terrible privations and sufferings. On the 11th November they arrived* in the Bay of Cape Cod, and, although their perils by water were at an end, the real sufferings of the noble little band were only just beginning. They were constantly in danger of death from the savage tribes who inhabited the country. Standish was entrusted with the command of a small number of men whose duty it was to protect the emigrants, a duty that carried with it heavy responsibilities as well as danger. In the many fights which this small "commando" had with the Indians, Standish was always conspicuous for his bravery. Soon after the landing he set out with sixteen men to explore the unknown land. They incurred great risks, and it was almost a miracle that they did not perish. On one occasion the Indians made a surprise attack and the small party was almost cut off, but fortunately escaped. In 1623 the settlers learned of a great plot

* In December, 1620, they selected New Plymouth as the site of the colony.

amongst the Indians to exterminate the white men. Standish was commissioned to watch them and seize the ringleaders. He did his duty in his own fashion and fearlessly went amongst them and struck the first blow. Two of the Indians were killed and the rest fled. This was the first encounter in which there was any loss of life, and the character of the Puritans may be gathered from Robinson's lament—"O how happy a thing had it been if you had converted some before killing any." In most of the skirmishes with the Indians Standish was in command, and he also commanded against the Dutch and French. He arrested Morton, one of the adventurers who sold guns and ammunition to the Indians at Merry Mount. He wished to have him shot, but the governor would not permit it. "For nearly forty years he (Standish) was the leading spirit of the colony in every undertaking which needed courage and military skill."

In the months which followed the arrival of the emigrants in America, they suffered heavily from sickness, and Standish lost his wife, Rose Standish. At this time he revealed other noble traits of character. He undertook the duties of a nurse, and in his dealings with the sick showed great tenderness and compassion. Speaking of this (and their distress through sickness). Governor Bradford says :—

In ye time of most distres ther was but 6 or 7 sound persons; who to their great comendations, be its spoken, spared no pains, night nor day, but with abundance of love, and hazzard of their owne health, fetched them wood, made them fires, drest them meat, made their beds, washed ther . . . cloaks, clothed and unclothed them, in a word did all ye homly and necessarie offices for them . . . and all this willingly and cherfully, without any growling in ye least, shewing herein their true love unto their friends and brethren; a rare example and worthy to be remembered. Tow [two] of these 7 were nd [named] William Brewster, their reuerend elder, and Myles Standish, their captain and military comander (unto whom my selfe and many others were much beholden in our low and sicke condition).

For many years Standish was assistant governor, and also treasurer of the colony. He died at Duxbury (America) on the 3rd of October, 1656. He was twice married. Rose, his first wife, died, as previously stated, in the first winter after the landing, and he married Barbara, said by tradition to be a younger sister of Rose, in 1623. He left five children—Alexander, Miles, Josiah, Charles, and Lora.

He has been immortalized by two of America's greatest poets. Longfellow has placed him in a ludicrous position in "The Courtship of Myles Standish," and Lowell has made him the subject of a poem entitled "An Interview with Myles Standish." Longfellow's poem is best known, and the incident narrated is believed by many to be true. We can only imagine, however, that it is another example of "poetic licence."

In his will Standish said "I give unto my son and heir apparent, Alexander Standish, all my lands as heir apparent by lawful descent in Ormistic, Bouscough, Wrightington, Maudsley, Newburrow, Cranston and the Isle of Man, and given to me as right heir by lawful descent, but surreptitiously detained from me, my grandfather being a second or younger brother from the house of Standish of Standish."

He states definitely in this document that he was descended from the Standishes of Standish, but, as the Standishes of Duxbury were descended from the Standishes of Standish, it might easily mean either of the two branches. It is believed that he belonged to the Duxbury branch of the family because he named his estate in New England, Duxbury. The belief is supported by evidence that he was certainly not a Roman Catholic, whereas the Standishes of Standish were Roman Catholics and the Standishes of Duxbury were Protestants.*

Standish also states that lands† in Ormskirk, Burscough, Wrightington, Mawdsley, Newbrough, Croston and the Isle of Man were "surreptitiously

* At the time of the Reformation a division took place, and the Duxbury Standishes became Protestants.

† It is very strange that no mention is made of lands in Standish or Duxbury where the Standish estates are situated.

detained" from him and it is believed by many, especially in America, that he was robbed of his rightful inheritance.

The principal reason for supposing that he was "basely defrauded," as Longfellow puts it, is that a page in the Registers of the Parish Church of Chorley for 1584 (the supposed year of his birth) has been tampered with, and the names contained on it cannot be traced. As, however, there is no record of anyone ever having seen his name on the page, the belief that it was there can only be founded on conjecture.

Standish was a man whose character commands one's admiration. He was a "hero and a gentleman." His nobility showed itself in the protection of the native women. "He would not take their beaver coats nor suffer the least discourtesy to be offered to them." With the captured Indians he was a model of kindness and gave strict orders that they should have every possible comfort. Many of the Indians loved and trusted him. He learned to speak their language and was always useful in dealing with them. His services to the colony were very great, and had it not been for his bravery and military skill, every man, woman and child would in all probability have perished and the history of the American continent would have been other than it is.

As all readers of Longfellow would imagine, Standish was a booklover. A list of his books, with the prices affixed by his executors, is as follows:—

	£	s.
History of the World, and Turkish History...	1	10
Chronicle of England, and Country Farmer...		08
History of Queen Elizabeth, State of Europe...	1	10
Dr. Hall's Works, Calvin's Institutions	1	04
Wilcox's Works, and Mayor's	1	00
Rogers' Seven Treatises, and French Academy		12
Three Old Bibles		14
Cæsar's Commentaries, Bariffe's Artillery ...		10
Preston's Sermons, Burroughs' Christian Contentment, Gospel Conversation, Passions of the Mind, The Physician's Practice, Burroughs' Earthly Mindedness, do. Discoveries	1	04
Ball on Faith, Brinly's Watch, Dodd on the Lord's Supper, Sparks Against Heresy, Davenport's Apology		10
A Reply to Dr. Cotton on Baptism, The German History, The Sweden Intelligencer, Reason Discussed		10
One Testament, Psalm Book, Nature and Grace in Conflict, A Law Book, The Mean in Mourning, Allegations, Johnson Against Hearing		06

Parcel of Old Books, divers subjects, 4to ...	14
" " " " " 8vo ...	05
Wilson's Dictionary, Homer's Iliad, Commentary on James Ball's Catechism ...	12
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John Alden, }
James Cudworth, } Dec. 2, 1656.

The greatness of Standish has not been locally recognised. Rightly or wrongly the vicinity of Chorley is the only district mentioned as his birthplace, yet there is nothing here to suggest to the stranger that Standish is known in the town. Other towns have their statues of men of less greatness, but in Chorley there is not even a tablet to the memory of the mighty puritan hero. Occasionally a pilgrim from America visits the district, and one cannot help thinking of his disappointed feelings when he finds nothing to remind him of America's pioneer soldier. But in America it is different. On the 17th of October, 1872, the corner stone of the Standish monument was laid in the little town of Duxbury (United States). A metal plate bore the following inscription:—

The Standish Monument.

The Corner Stone
of the
Standish Memorial

in commemoration of the character and services
of

CAPTAIN MYLES STANDISH,
The first commissioned military officer
of New England,

Laid on the summit of Captain's Hill, in Duxbury,
under the superintendence of
The Ancient and Honourable Artillery Company,
of Massachusetts,

In presence of
The Standish Monument Association
by the

M.W. Grand Lodge of Free Masons,
of Massachusetts,

M.W. Sereno D. Nickerson, Grand Master,
the seventeenth day of October, A.D. 1872,

Being the Two hundred and Fifty-second year since
the first Settlement of New England
by the

Pilgrim Fathers.

Site consecrated August 17, 1871.

Association incorporated May 4, 1872.

Association organised and ground broken June
17, 1872.

Corner of Foundation laid August 9, 1872.

When the spot on Captain's Hill was consecrated, General Horace Burney Sargent, who delivered the oration, said, "Myles Standish represented the true idea of public service, vigorous fidelity, and trained fitness for his place. In his single heroic person he presented the true idea of the army; skilled military force in loyal subordination to the civil authority. The confidence that the colony reposed in him to execute their most difficult commands as a soldier, seems to prove that he revered, in the words of Mr. Robinson's farewell sermon, 'the image of the Lord's power and authority which the magistrate beareth.' To be the founders of states is the first of glories, according to Lord Bacon. The career of our Pilgrim hero is a beautiful illustration of an education fitted to the great mission for which he seemed peculiarly, strangely ordained. In grateful memory we consecrate this spot of earth to the memory of the Great Puritan Captain. May its shadow fall upon his grave. For two centuries the stars have looked upon it. At what moment of the night the circling moon may point it out with shadowy finger no mortal knows. No mortal can hear the secret whispered to the night—'Beneath this spot lies all of a hero that could die.'"

And Mr. Goodwin, at the close of an interesting account of Standish in *The Pilgrim Republic* * says in a fine passage :—

"Great as a ruler over others, he was far greater as a ruler over himself. His services merit our warmest gratitude, and challenge our admiration. He was the man of men whom the Pilgrims most needed to come to them, and nothing was more improbable than that such a one would do so, or if he did, that he would long remain loyal, steadfast, and submissive to the voice of the people. No man ever more decidedly had a mission, and none ever more nobly fulfilled it."

* I am indebted to the courtesy of the Rev. Alexander Mackennal, D.D., author of *Homes and Haunts of the Pilgrim Fathers*, for the loan of Mr. Goodwin's book.